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# Internships: An Academic Requirement?

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# INTERNSHIPS

## AN ACADEMIC REQUIREMENT?

ARCH 821 - Architecture Research and Design Methods  
Instructors: Dina Battisto and Deborah Franqui

### ABSTRACT

Internships are an important part of an architectural education, and how schools deal with internships is a topic of widespread debate. The goal of this project is to develop a clear understanding of **architectural internships and their relationship with architecture schools**. The project included an architecture student survey, which provided an overview of advantages, drawbacks, and issues associated with internships. The study also involved research of three case study architecture schools: Clemson University, the University of Michigan, and the University of Cincinnati. These schools demonstrated varying levels of internship requirements. Based on the findings, recommendations are provided to improve schools' architecture career services.

### INTRODUCTION

Many architecture students are **graduating with little to no work experience and few professional connections** outside of school, thereby making the job hunt after graduation very difficult.

"At present, architecture treats its education, internship, and exam as separate acts with little overlap" (Cary, 2011).

While this statement is true in most cases, some architecture schools are integrating internships into their curriculum. Does a required internship benefit architecture students and make them more employable after graduation? **This study is intended to expand the understanding of architectural internships and their relationship to academics, and to provide insight to schools seeking to develop an internship program and improve their career services.**

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**How is an internship beneficial to architecture students?**  
**Should schools require an internship in their curriculum?**

### RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

The study involved both quantitative survey research and qualitative case study research. This mixed-methods approach was appropriate, because it allowed evaluation of many sides of the issue.

Both graduate and undergraduate architecture students were surveyed from various schools across the nation. Using Qualtrics, an online survey engine, nearly 80 responses were received. The goal of the survey was to gain a better understanding of architectural internships from the student's perspective.

Case studies were completed for three different schools: Clemson University, University of Michigan, and University of Cincinnati. These schools demonstrate varying levels of internship requirements. Clemson has no internship requirement; the University of Michigan offers an optional spring break externship, and the University of Cincinnati requires several cooperative internship semesters. The goal of completing these case studies was to understand which type of program is most effective. Existing literature includes architecture student handbooks, rankings, and school websites. As a part of the case studies, internship or career service coordinators were interviewed at each of three schools. Rob Silance from Clemson University, Liam Ream from the University of Cincinnati, and Beth Berenter from the University of Michigan were interviewees. Each provided valuable insight into their school's programs.

### CONCLUSIONS

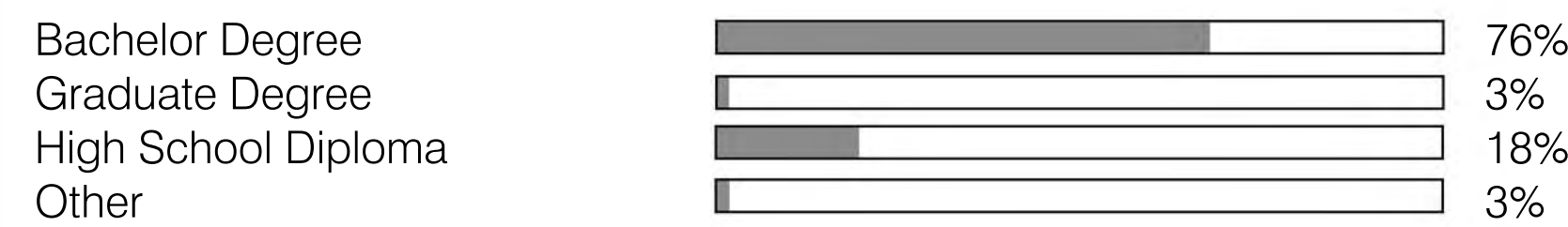
**This research project is aimed at improving the architectural education. The following conclusions were developed based on data from the survey and interviews:**

- 1) Despite a few drawbacks, such as time commitment and low pay, internships are vastly beneficial to students. They provide real-world skills that cannot be attained in the academic setting.**
- 2) Obtaining a job is strongly influenced by personal connections, but students have trouble establishing professional contacts on their own.**
- 3) Holding architectural internships as an academic requirement is not always feasible. Unless schools can guarantee internships, this would be an unfair obligation to students.**
- 4) Extensive internship placement programs are not possible at many schools because of limitations such as size, location, and resources.**
- 5) Because architecture is such a specialized field, individual college-controlled career services can be more effective than centralized university career services.**

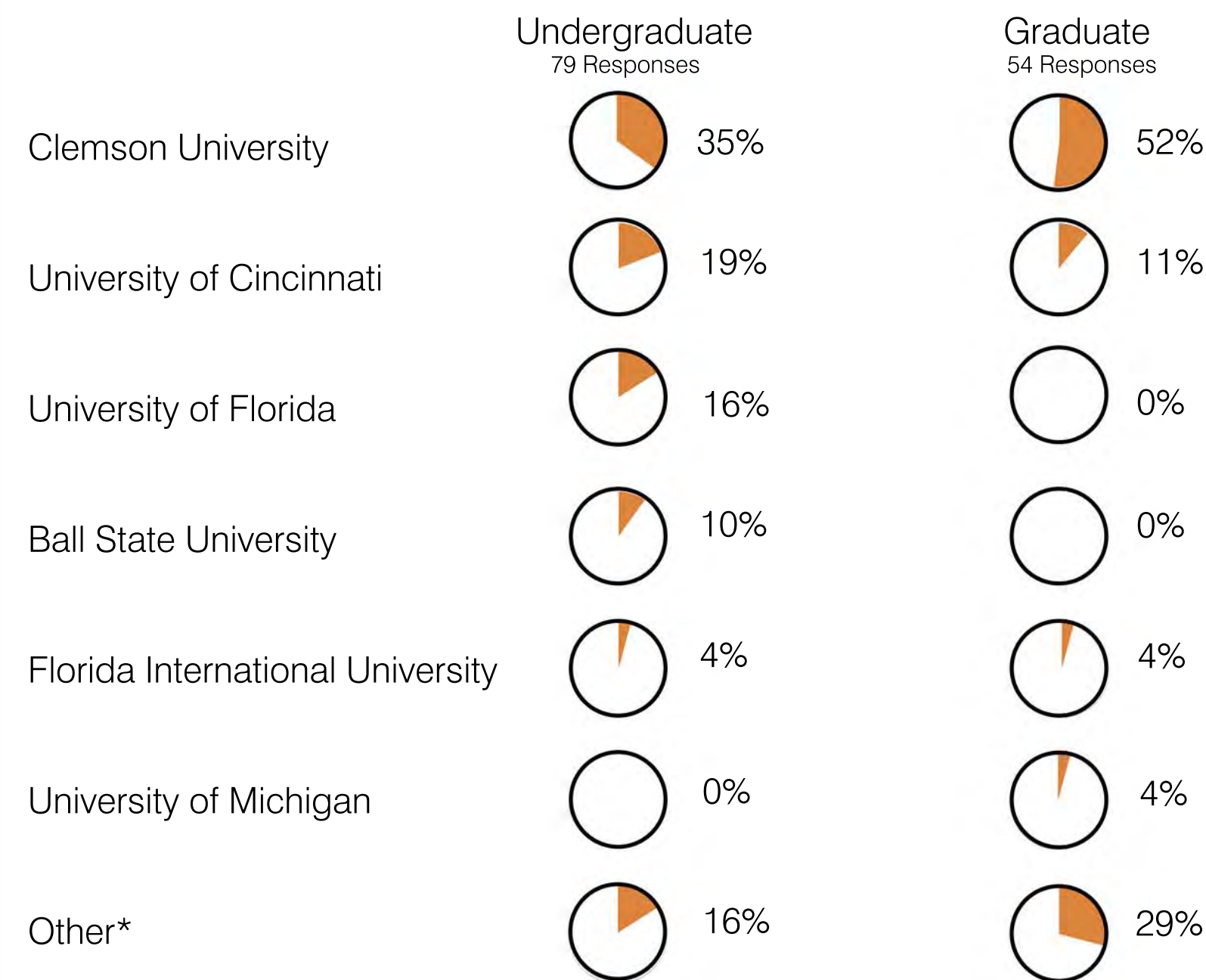
### DEMOGRAPHICS

Total Responses: 79

Highest Degree Completed:



Surveyed Schools:



\*Other Schools included: Emory University, Institute of Technology of Costa Rica, Washington University St. Louis, Kent State University, Texas A&M University, Wake Forest University, University of Georgia, Shenzhen University, Nanchang University, Pennsylvania State University, University of South Carolina, Purdue University, Georgia Tech University, University of Connecticut, North China Tech University, Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, Rhode Island School of Design, Tulane University, Kent State, Yale University, Ohio State University, Rochester Institute of Technology, University of Los Angeles, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Harvard University, UC Berkeley, University College of London, University of Wisconsin Milwaukee

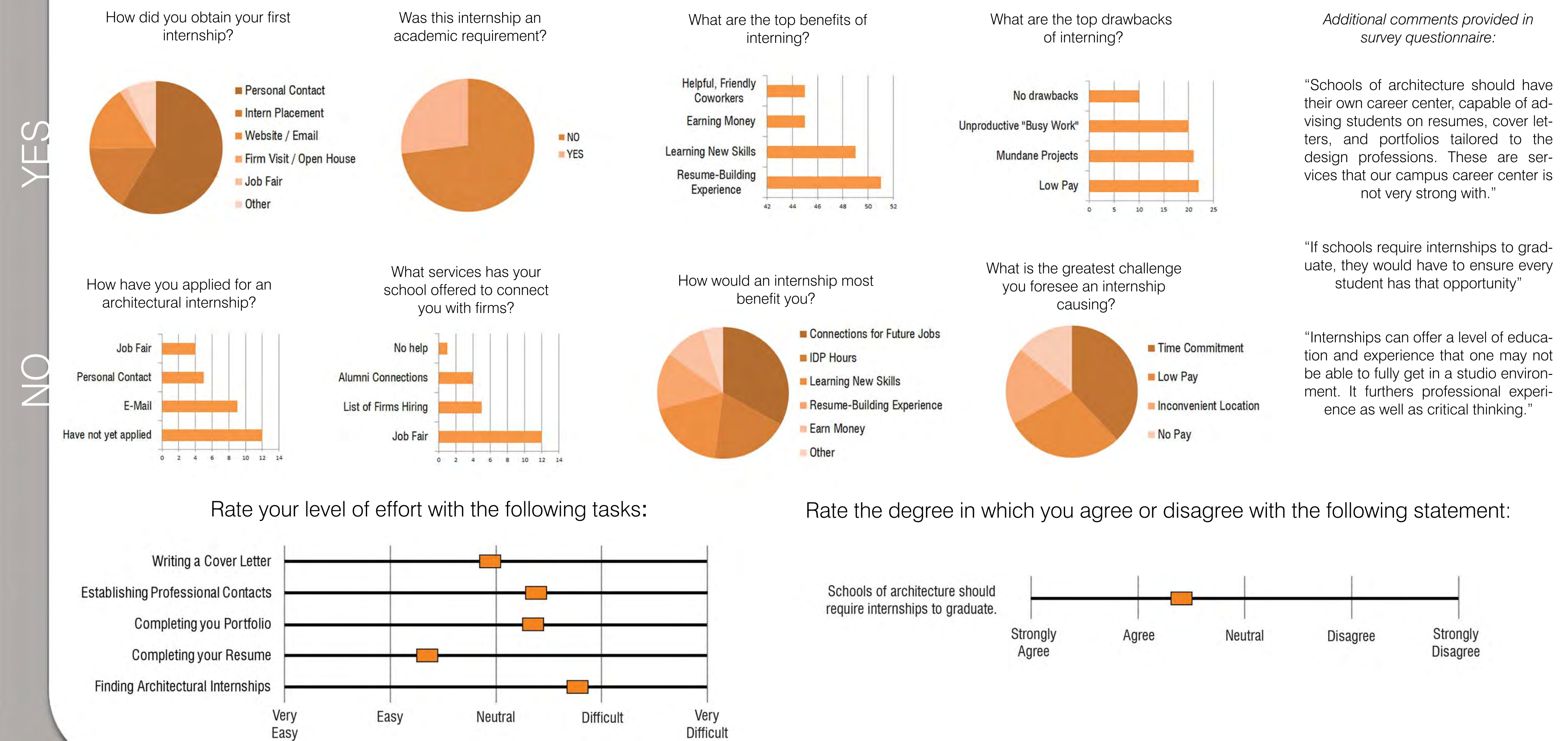
### RECOMMENDATIONS

Even if the curriculum does not required internships, schools should do as much as possible to prepare their students for the job search. **Clemson University's architecture career services have much room for improvement. The following recommendations may benefit Clemson, or any school wishing to improve their career services:**

### SURVEY RESULTS

Have you participated in an Architectural Internship?

Yes - 72% No - 28%



- 1) Provide opportunities to connect students and employers: Career Fairs, Alumni Connection Events, and Student Work Exhibitions...**
- 2) Prepare students for their job search: Portfolio Classes, Resume Workshops, and Mock-Interviews...**
- 3) Send students out of the architecture building: Firm visits, Job Shadows, and One-Week Externships...**
- 4) stress individual college-controlled career services instead of centralized university career services.**



University of Cincinnati  
College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning  
Interviewee: Liam Ream, AIA, Assistant Professor & BSArch Co-op Adviser

#### Internship: Required

##### CINCINNATI'S PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE PROGRAM

The University of Cincinnati's Professional Practice Program, also known as cooperative education or co-op, is an academic requirement for both undergraduate and graduate architecture students. 94.8 percent of the architecture students are placed into internships each semester. Students alternate between co-op semesters and on-campus semesters, taking part in a total of 3 to 5 co-op semesters before graduation. Through the co-op program, Cincinnati students develop professional connections, enhance their resume, and acquire new skills. Students also earn IDP hours and hourly pay; the average hourly earnings are \$12.23 for undergraduate and \$14.60 for graduate architecture students (Cincinnati, 2012). Cincinnati's BSArch Co-op Adviser, Leam Ream, provided an insider's perspective into the program. "Co-op is often credited as one of the reasons our university of 40,000+ has ranked so highly against more established, larger and wealthier institutions." He claims, "We have relationships with over 11,000 firms and administer over 6,000 placements per academic year."

##### CAREER SERVICES AT CINCINNATI

Career services are strongly integrated into the curriculum at the University of Cincinnati. Ream stated, "A big part of our mission is helping students interweave theory and practice." Introduction courses, job meetings, job fairs, emails, and online resources all help prepare the student for the Co-op experience. Once placed, the student identifies learning objectives. Throughout the semester, they complete evaluations of their experience, based on their stated objectives. Students often report that technical, organizational, and communicative skills acquired in the field improve their academic performance.

##### WHAT PREVENTS OTHER SCHOOLS FROM ADOPTING AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM?

- 1) The stigma of "vocational schools"**
- 2) Lack of knowledge in how to initiate it, staff it, approve it, and fund it**
- 3) The power struggle between centralized university career services and individual college control**



University of Michigan  
Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning  
Interviewee: Beth Berenter, Student Career Counselor

#### Internship: Optional

##### CAREER SERVICES AT MICHIGAN

Beth Berenter, Student Career Counselor at the University of Michigan, was interviewed about the career services offered to Michigan architecture students. Berenter has worked as career counselor for 10 years. She assists architecture students in their search for internships, and organizes events to help them. Michigan hosts several career workshops each year, covering topics such as interviewing skills and job search strategies. The school also hosts an Architecture Career Fair every Spring. They are even using social media as a career finding tool; Michigan has a Linked-In group that is only open to architecture alumni and current students at Michigan. Perhaps the most unique career service at Michigan is their externship program.

##### EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Taubman College's Spring Break Connections Externship Program is an optional internship experience held each year during Michigan's Spring break. The program is available to junior, senior, and graduate architecture students. It allows one week of experience in a professional environment. Students often sit in on meetings, visit job sites, shadow architects, and take part in small tasks such as research, drawings, or modeling. Hundreds of firms and students participate in the program every year. In 2012, 130 architecture students took part in the externship (Michigan, 2012). The program is completely voluntary; it is not an academic requirement. To apply, students fill out an online application, submit a resume, and indicate the city or firm they would like to work for. The school contacts the firms to set up the unpaid externship, an "extended job shadow". Connections with firms are developed primarily through Michigan architecture alumni. Berenter explained, "Getting a job is all about contacts." Students develop these contacts during their week with the firm. The externship often leads to a summer internship or a full-time position after graduation.

##### IDEALLY, WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO MICHIGAN'S EXTERNSHIP PROGRAM?

- 1) Because NCARB requires a minimum of 8 consecutive weeks of work in order to gain IDP hours, students get no IDP credit for their one-week internship.**
- 2) Setting up sponsorships would be helpful, so students could get paid for their work.**



Clemson University  
College of Architecture, Art, and Humanities  
Interviewee: Rob Silance, NCARB, IDP Education Counselor

#### Internship: No Requirement

##### CAREER SERVICES AT CLEMSON

Clemson University does not require internships for their architecture students. Both undergraduate and graduate architecture students must find their own internships without assistance from the school.

Clemson's main contribution to architecture career services is its IDP program. The University pays for seniors and graduate students to establish their NCARB record. In 2012, Clemson enrolled 66 IDP applicants (Michelle McLane). Rob Silance, Clemson's IDP Education Counselor, discussed the school's career services. Clemson educates students about establishing records and logging hours, but when it comes to actually finding the job, "the university does not get involved."

Clemson has recently attempted to connect students with internships through a new event. For the past two years, Kate Schwennsen has organized an Architecture Career Fair. This event allows face-to-face interaction between students and potential employers. Sixteen firms participated in February of 2012.

##### INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Clemson has no organized system of job placement, with the exception of the Charleston program, which has historically embedded the internship into its curriculum. Supplementing the typical architecture courses with an opportunity to intern reinforces the link between academic and professional worlds. Silance said, "The internship defined the Charleston experience. It was a big draw for students." While the CAC.C still allows students to compete for internships, it is no longer an academic requirement there. After the economic downfall, there are simply not enough firms to employ all of the students.

##### IDEALLY, WHAT CHANGES WOULD YOU MAKE TO CLEMSON'S ARCHITECTURE CAREER SERVICES?

- 1) Students need to understand that IDP is job oriented. We should develop a connection between IDP services and events such as the Career Fair.**
- 2) Strengthen internship visibility and face-to-face connections between students and professionals.**

##### LIMITATIONS:

Time constraints limited the number of case studies. Future research may explore how many more schools deal with architectural internships. Survey responses were limited to the architecture students whose contact information was readily available. Responses came largely from Clemson graduate students, and many schools were not represented.

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